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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
April 3, 2006  
Confirmation Hearing

The Committee on Education met at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, April 3, 2006, in Room 1525 of the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the appointment of Mr. Dennis Miller, Jr. to the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. Senators present: Ron Raikes, Chairperson; Dennis Byars, Vice Chairperson; Patrick Bourne; Gwen Howard; Gail Kopplin; Vickie McDonald; and Elaine Stuhr. Senators absent: Ed Schrock.

CONFIRMATION HEARING ON  
DENNIS MILLER TO THE  
NEBRASKA EDUCATIONAL  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

SENATOR RAIKES: Good morning. We'll go ahead and open the hearing and then please stand by and we'll ask you for a few comments. To begin, this is a hearing of the Education Committee of the Nebraska Legislature to consider a gubernatorial appointment to the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission. The appointee is Dennis Miller. Dennis, let me introduce our committee members to you. We have Senator Pat Bourne from Omaha, Senator Gail Kopplin from Gretna, Senator Elaine Stuhr from Bradshaw. Here with us today is also our legal counsel, Tammy Barry. I'm Ron Raikes from District 25. Our committee's Vice Chair is Senator Dennis Byars from Beatrice. We have Senator Vickie McDonald from St. Paul, Senator Gwen Howard from Omaha, Senator Ed Schrock from Elm Creek is not here yet but perhaps will be. And our committee clerk, who I think you've already talked to Kris Valentin. We'll begin the hearing here in a moment. We'll ask for some comments from you and allow questions from the members that are here. Then we'll ask for proponent testimony, opponent testimony, neutral testimony, and then close the hearing after that. So, again, welcome, Dennis, and, if you would, please tell us a little bit about yourself. I understand this would be a new position for you. Tell us about yourself and why you're interested in this appointment.

DENNIS MILLER: (via telephone) (Exhibit 1) Good morning, Senators. Thank you for allowing me to call in rather than

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drive this morning. It'd been a long ways from the Panhandle of Lewellen. I'm a retired naval officer. I spent about 25 years in the Navy. My education is aerospace engineering from the University of Kansas. My time in the Navy was primarily in the nuclear power world. I was chief engineer of a nuclear power cruiser which was probably the height of my career. I spent quite a bit of time when I wasn't at sea on a cruiser in education in the Navy one way or the other, teaching a class such as senior officer material readiness courses which was high up in Idaho. Right now I farm, and I manage a small irrigation canal and do a variety of volunteer activities. Let's see, Western Nebraska Community College Board is one of those and because of being on that board, I put my name in for this particular position. Let's see, I'm married and my wife and I live here in Nebraska. We have two grown boys, one living in Lincoln and one living in Tacoma, Washington. My interest in the position is, I guess primarily related to keeping balanced and I'll call it unbiased information flowing throughout Nebraska, especially the news programs that I hear I appreciate. Instead of trying to shout each other down and use a lot of negative things, it's very even and informative and broad-based. If you listen to the radio in the morning you might hear about what's happening in Liberia, probably and other news media that you wouldn't hear that, so there's very broad information being provided to members of this state. I think it's very important, especially in this very quickly changing world we're in and people can learn about the challenges that are coming on because of what's happening around the world as well as opportunities. Connectivity in the Panhandle is a big issue especially, I suppose, with the high-speed Internet and fiberoptics and...but even with the fact that if you're out here and you probably, ...many people out here would have to use satellites. And we don't get NET over satellite from Nebraska. We get Colorado out in the Panhandle, and I don't know that that can be changed, but those kinds of issues are important to me because I like to see us have unity within the state and for people out here to have full range of information that's coming. Of course, on radio stations we have that and we get what's happening in the Legislature over that, which is very good. I guess that's kind of the general comments, and if there are any specific questions.

SENATOR RAIKES: Okay, thank you very much, Dennis. Do we

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have questions from the committee for Dennis? Senator McDonald has one.

SENATOR McDONALD: Yes, Dennis. Who is your state senator?

DENNIS MILLER: (Laugh) Phil Erdman is my state senator.

SENATOR McDONALD: Okay, well, it wasn't listed on the paperwork.

DENNIS MILLER: Oh, I'm sorry.

SENATOR RAIKES: Okay. Any other questions? Senator Stuhr has one.

SENATOR STUHR: Thank you, Dennis, for your willingness to serve. I see you have been involved in a number of activities and you've been back in Nebraska 15 years, is that correct?

DENNIS MILLER: That's correct. I came back in '91.

SENATOR STUHR: Has it been all that you had expected it to be? (Laugh)

DENNIS MILLER: Well, probably yes, and more. I have been involved (laugh) in doing a lot of things. I enjoy Nebraska. I've enjoyed every place I've lived, and I was kind of surprised to come back. My family is here and they're very important to me, but Nebraska is a great place to live. And my son went down to Houston with his family and actually because his wife has an education degree, and they pay so much better in Texas than they do in Nebraska and they recruited her down there, but they moved back to Nebraska. They like the Nebraska life and that's another issue, you know, is how we pay teachers and the part, the whole education thing. But has it been all I expected it to be? Yes, I think so (laugh).

SENATOR STUHR: Okay (laugh), well, thank you. Thank you very much. I see also you have a wide variety of hobbies and interests, gardening and birdwatching.

DENNIS MILLER: Yes, we like to walk to the river. You know, Nebraska, especially in western Nebraska, we're one of

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the richest bird watching areas that there is around. Along the North Platte River, of course, and you can go up into the Sandhills at Crescent Lake Reserve, and we've got Clear Creek down here. It would probably be something we could really expand it as far as economic development if a person were clever (inaudible).

SENATOR STUHR: Yes, I think that is very true. I think we found out one time when we were visiting that Lake McConaughy has more birds than any place in the United States, which was really very interesting, so...

DENNIS MILLER: Right. But eagles, of course, were a big one there.

SENATOR STUHR: Well, thank you very much for your willingness to serve.

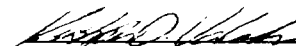
DENNIS MILLER: Thank you.

SENATOR RAIKES: Any other questions for Dennis? Okay, well, let me add my thanks for your willingness to serve, Dennis. And if you stand by, any proponent testimony? Opponent testimony? Neutral testimony? Okay, that will close the hearing and, again, thank you very much, Dennis, for visiting with us and for your willingness to serve.

DENNIS MILLER: Thank you, Senators. I appreciate your time.

SENATOR RAIKES: Okay.

  
Chairperson

  
Committee Clerk